



Best Practices in Egypt: Mobilizing Community Outreach Workers



Outreach workers receive training on the TAHSEEN/CATALYST project health messages

The CATALYST Consortium is a global reproductive health and family planning activity initiated in September 2000 by the Office of Population and Reproductive Health, Bureau for Global Health of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The Consortium is a partnership of five organizations: Academy for Educational Development (AED), Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA), Meridian Group International, Inc., Pathfinder International and PROFAMILIA/Colombia. CATALYST works in reproductive health and family planning through synergistic partnerships and state-of-the-art technical leadership. Its overall strategic objective is to increase the use of sustainable, quality reproductive health and family planning services and healthy practices through clinical and nonclinical programs.

Mission

CATALYST's mission is to improve the quality and availability of sustainable reproductive health and family planning services.

The authors' views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

Best Practices: Mobilizing Community Outreach Workers

THE NEED

For the past two decades, female and male outreach workers (*ra'aidat rifiat* and *mothekaf sekany*, respectively) have been acting as community-based family planning educators in Egypt. They started with the Egyptian Family Planning Association, the International Planned Parenthood Federation's affiliate in Egypt. Then, in 1994, inspired by their success and by the International Conference on Population and Development, the Egyptian Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP) decided to scale-up use of these workers. Now the MOHP hires and trains outreach workers, under the auspice of the local MOHP clinic, to act as family planning educators in every community.

In rural areas, these female outreach workers deliver family planning education and counseling to women through home visits, while male outreach workers conduct education sessions in public venues. In urban areas, both men and women conduct home visits and public education activities. The involvement of these well-regarded members of the community has contributed immensely to improving the acceptability of family planning in Egypt, once a controversial topic. However, because of budgetary considerations, the MOHP is able to provide on average only two outreach workers per community. These workers' role is limited to family planning, which ultimately limits their usefulness to clients. Moreover, the potential of these leaders to mobilize Egyptians to change reproductive health and family planning behaviors and encourage appropriate service use has not been tapped.

THE TAHSEEN SOLUTION

TAHSEEN worked with the MOHP and several NGOs to (1) increase the number of community outreach workers; (2) expand their role to include maternal-child health responsibilities; and (3) improve their communication, mobilization, and referral skills. To do this, TAHSEEN and its partners:

Developed three new training curricula

- For female MOHP outreach workers. At the request of the MOHP, TAHSEEN developed a five-day training for MOHP *ra'aidat rifiat* that addresses family planning and maternal-child health knowledge, conducting a successful home visit, communication skills, and developing effective health education messages. The maternal-child health component of this training covers antenatal visits, nutrition during and after pregnancy, breastfeeding, postpartum care, contraception after delivery, early childhood development, violence against women, and gender equity. TAHSEEN also developed a training-of-trainers program for this training package.
- For male MOHP outreach workers. TAHSEEN also developed a five-day training for the MOHP's *mothekaf sekany*. The content of this curriculum is similar to that of the female outreach workers, except that it covers public speaking rather than home visits.

- For female NGO outreach workers. TAHSEEN developed a six-day training program for NGO *ra'aidat rifiat*. This curriculum resembles the curriculum for the MOHP female outreach worker, except that it offers an additional day of role plays and communication training, thought necessary for these less experienced personnel. TAHSEEN also developed a training-of-trainers curriculum so that NGO partners could train their own staff in the future.

Trained outreach workers. In each of TAHSEEN's 56 target communities, the training and mobilization of outreach workers was timed to coincide with clinic renovations, clinic staff training, activation of clinic boards, and mobilization of community leaders. Selection criteria for trainees included communication skills, commitment to health, and home community. During the female MOHP outreach worker training, TAHSEEN trained outreach workers from its focus communities plus five outreach workers from other villages to spread the impact beyond participating TAHSEEN communities.

Restructured outreach worker catchment areas. TAHSEEN recommended that MOHP and NGO outreach workers be assigned to work only in their own communities, a change which has greatly increased trust and openness between outreach workers and community members.

Worked with NGOs to increase the number of outreach workers. The MOHP typically has two to four outreach workers assigned to each of the communities participating in TAHSEEN's program. To increase the number of active outreach workers, TAHSEEN funded its NGO partners to hire an additional 10 outreach workers per community. These additional outreach workers were linked to the local clinic and often focused on socially vulnerable and geographically isolated families.

Expanded the role of some MOHP outreach workers to conduct women's empowerment seminars. TAHSEEN identified female MOHP outreach workers who had been trained by Arab Women Speak Out (AWSO), a women's empowerment program designed by the John Hopkins University's Center for Communication Programs. AWSO uses the powerful stories of successful Arab women role models to inspire other Arab women to achieve their dreams, for example, by engaging in income-generating activities. TAHSEEN enlisted trained female outreach workers—from each TAHSEEN governorate—to deliver this program to women's clubs that meet at renovated TAHSEEN clinics. Several of these women also became literacy facilitators, beginning their own classes through TAHSEEN's partnership with Egypt's national literacy agency.

Coordinated outreach worker activities with village-level planning. To better involve outreach workers in educating and mobilizing their community, TAHSEEN encouraged them to participate in the development of village health plans by clinic boards. By participating, community outreach workers better understood the relevance of their work in the community and they were able to coordinate their activities with those elaborated in the village plan. As part of this process, MOHP and NGO outreach workers worked with clinic boards to define their outreach responsibilities and their role with regard to

other TAHSEEN outreach activities, for example, helping to train agricultural extension workers to be reproductive health/family planning educators and participating in youth education and empowerment activities. Working from the village plan created an opportunity for unprecedented collaboration between MOHP and NGO outreach workers as they worked together to ensure full community coverage and widespread community participation in awareness-raising activities.

Improved outreach worker monitoring. TAHSEEN is in the process of developing tools with which to monitor the quality of outreach worker activities. Although these tools are not finalized, they will go far in improving the effectiveness of outreach workers' activities in the future.

RESULTS

Outreach workers trained. As of June 2005, TAHSEEN had trained 816 outreach workers in Minia, Fayoum, Beni Suef, and three poor urban areas of Cairo:

- 430 female NGO outreach workers.
- 311 female MOHP outreach workers.
- 75 male MOHP outreach workers.

Outreach workers' knowledge increased. Questionnaires given to 128 female MOHP outreach workers before and after training showed a dramatic improvement in knowledge:

- 91% agreed that listening was a necessary skill when counseling clients, up from 48% before the training.
- 88% understood that combined oral contraceptives are not an appropriate contraceptive method for lactating women, up from 41% before the training.
- 95% correctly understood that breast lumps are not a natural outcome of menopause so that women with breast lumps should be referred to a doctor, up from 48% before the training.
- 96% understood that female genital mutilation does not affect a woman's sexual desire, up from 46% before the training.

Outreach workers providing home visits and referrals. Outreach workers are playing a major role in educating families and referring individuals to their local clinic. TAHSEEN does not monitor the work of MOHP outreach workers, but female NGO outreach workers have conducted nearly 104,257 home visits in Minia, Fayoum, and Beni Suef Governorates between November 2004-January 2005, and they generated nearly 16,830 referrals in that period:

Female NGO Outreach Worker Activities, November 2004-January 2005

Governorate	Home visits	Referrals
Minia	56,010	6,669
Fayoum	34,894	3,159
Beni Suef	13,353	7,002
TOTAL	104,257	16,830

Outreach workers mobilizing and providing information to communities. Outreach workers have participated in many TAHSEEN activities, including: raising awareness about the availability of improved services at newly renovated clinics; structuring youth education activities; publicizing TAHSEEN's educational plays and puppet shows; and assisting with the reproductive health/family planning training of agriculture and irrigation extension workers.

Outreach worker training is contributing to sustainability. The MOHP requested the training of its outreach workers and has accepted the training materials developed by TAHSEEN for use by their national training program. TAHSEEN also developed training-of-trainers materials for NGOs, so they can also continue training their outreach staff.

